

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Plan Overview and Purpose

Maricopa County has experienced rapid growth throughout its history, but especially during the last 40 years. While most of this growth occurred in central and eastern Maricopa County, recent patterns indicate that the western Phoenix metropolitan area will experience tremendous population growth and development over the next several decades. To help accommodate anticipated growth while preserving this area's quality of life, Maricopa County prepared the Little Rainbow Valley Land Use Plan, which was first adopted in 1988, and updated the plan in 1990 and 1992. The latest Rainbow Valley Area Plan update is necessary to reflect current citizen issues; population increases; Growing Smarter and Growing Smarter Plus legislation; and land use, boundary, and annexation changes. The planning area was expanded south to the boundary of the new Sonoran Desert National Monument so that future planning in the region will consider the Monument and potential growth issues in the unincorporated areas bordering public lands and the City of Goodyear.

Based on comments received during the public participation process, particular consideration is given to the continuance of the rural lifestyle, preservation of hillsides and floodplains, and compatibility with the natural environment. Because surrounding cities and communities such as Buckeye, Goodyear, and Estrella Mountain Ranch support employment, there is not an emphasis at this time on providing employment in the planning area. Residential development at very low densities (1.0 dwelling unit/acre or less) is intended for most of the planning area. A small amount of large lot residential (1 to 2 dwelling units/acre) is added in this updated plan to coordinate with adjacent communities' land use plans and provide intermediate zoning between more intense uses outside the planning area and rural residential uses in the planning area.

The plan identifies timely opportunities to protect open space, plan for trails, encourage orderly development, and ensure a high quality of life. Rainbow Valley's unique geographic setting in the Gila River valley provides both opportunities and constraints. Constraints include flooding problems, limited routes out of the area, and a high water table increased further by surplus effluent. Opportunities include the scenic setting in the Gila River valley with surrounding mountain ranges, productive farmland, and rich opportunities for connecting regional open space corridors. The planning area's population has more than doubled in the last 10 years. Rainbow Valley has the advantage of being able to protect these resources in advance of development that will continue in this region.

Public Participation

Throughout the planning process, community participation was emphasized through various techniques. This participation allowed stakeholders to identify planning issues and concerns, as well as provide recommendations, comments, and suggestions. Rainbow Valley residents, landowners, workshop participants, and other stakeholders were helpful in identifying current issues and concerns. Some frequently identified local concerns include:

- Impacts from future growth on the environment and rural lifestyle
- Access over the Gila River and impacts of projected growth on local traffic circulation
- Dust, noise, and safety concerns over uncontrolled ATV activities

Citizens and stakeholders also helped identify several important planning objectives, which include:

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- Maintain existing (low density) rural lifestyle
- Discourage lot splits that create access problems or that are illegal
- Consider the Sonoran Desert National Monument in future land use planning
- Coordinate state, county, and local planning efforts
- Improve local law enforcement

What's New in the Plan?

- Updated information and citizen issues
- Geographic Information System (GIS) maps
- Five new planning elements required by Growing Smarter legislation
- Planning Area is now expanded south to the Sonoran Desert National Monument
- Agenda for Action identifies measures that can be undertaken to implement objectives and policies in the Area Plan
- Estrella Mountain Ranch community land use considerations
- New location of Neighborhood Retail/Commercial node
- Potential growth areas are identified that could accommodate slightly higher residential densities
- Recommendation of community-crafted Rural Development Guidelines to maintain and enhance the rural character of the community

Conclusion

It is important to note that the Rainbow Valley Area Plan is not a document that represents total planning area buildout. Rather, it prepares for and accommodates growth over the next ten to fifteen years but will be reexamined and updated periodically to reflect current conditions and changes. While not a complete solution, the Rainbow Valley Area Plan helps address the effects of growth and development by enhancing cooperation between government agencies, citizens, and other affected interests, and by considering regional implications.

Area Plan Elements

This Area Plan contains a series of goals, objectives, and policies used to define development standards, guide public investment, and guide public and private decision making.

Land Use

The land use element discusses general land use, development, and preservation concepts. Efforts are directed at encouraging efficient and timely growth patterns.

Goal L1: *Promote efficient land development that is compatible with adjacent land uses, is well integrated with the transportation system, and is sensitive to the natural environment.*

Objective L1.1: Encourage the timely and orderly expansion of the Urban Service Area.

Objective L1.2: Create high quality residential, commercial, and industrial land developments that are compatible with adjacent land uses.

Objective L1.3: Preserve the scenic and rural character of the Rainbow Valley planning area.

Transportation

The transportation element defines a system of transportation facilities and services, including existing and future roads, transit possibilities, road network connections, and system limitations. Efforts are directed at maximizing transportation system efficiency by coordinating land use and transportation planning. The premise for the transportation element is found in the *Southwest Valley Transportation Study*, developed by the Maricopa County DEPARTMENT of Transportation.

Goal T1: *Provide an efficient, cost-effective, integrated, accessible, environmentally sensitive, and safe countywide multi-modal system that addresses existing and future roadway networks, as well as promotes transit, bikeways, and pedestrian travel.*

Objective T1.1: Establish a circulation system that provides for the safe, convenient, and efficient movement of goods and people throughout Maricopa County.

Environmental Effects

The environmental effects element combines a survey of the physical and natural environment with an overview of anticipated effects that development may have on air quality, water quality, noise, visual quality, and sensitive plant and wildlife species.

Goal E1: *Promote development that considers adverse environmental impacts on the natural and cultural environment, preserves highly valued wildlife habitat, and protects historical and archaeological resources.*

Objective E1.1: Encourage developments that are compatible with significant natural environmental features and which do not lead to their destruction.

Objective E1.2: Improve air quality, water quality, and reduce noise impacts.

Objective E1.3: Preserve significant habitat areas for wildlife and desert plant species.

Economic Development

The economic development element focuses on creating a healthy economy in the planning area that increases living standards and quality of life.

Goal ED1: *Promote a growing, balanced, efficient, and diversified economy, consistent with available resources, that enhances quality employment opportunities, improves quality of life, and is sensitive to the natural and cultural environment.*

Objective ED1.1: Permit major commercial and employment centers where the labor force and infrastructure exist or are planned.

Objective ED1.2: In mixed use developments with densities greater than one dwelling unit per acre create a land use environment that generates a diversified economic base which fosters varied employment opportunities, and encourages business formation and expansion.

Objective ED1.3: Improve housing conditions in the Rainbow Valley planning area.

Growth Areas

The growth areas element identifies future population projections and land use needs to accommodate growth in unincorporated Maricopa County and encourages efficient and functional growth patterns.

Goal G.1: *Promote orderly, timely, and fiscally responsible growth in Maricopa County.*

Objective G.1.1: Encourage timely, orderly, and fiscally responsible growth within the General Plan Development Areas, within specially identified areas of County Area Plans intended for higher intensity use, and within mixed use Development Master Plans.

Objective G.1.2: Evaluate growth areas to ensure continued feasibility and effectiveness.

Objective G.1.3: Maintain cooperation with stakeholders to help ensure that future growth is coordinated in an efficient manner.

Open Space

The open space element provides an inventory of open space areas; analyzes future needs; and identifies policies and strategies for managing, protecting and acquiring additional open space areas.

Goal O1: *Maintain and, where necessary, encourage expanding the open space system for Maricopa County to address public access, connectivity, education, preservation, buffering, quantity, quality, and diversity for regionally significant open spaces.*

Objective O1.1: Promote physical and visual public access to open space resources.

Objective O1.2: Establish regional open space connectivity and linkages for both recreation and wildlife purposes.

Objective O1.3: Protect and enhance environmentally sensitive areas, including mountains and steep slopes; rivers and significant washes; historic, cultural, and archeological resources; view corridors; sensitive desert; and significant wildlife habitat and ecosystems.

Objective O1.4: Encourage appropriate open space between communities and other land uses.

Objective O1.5: Improve quantity, quality, and diversity of open space and recreational opportunities.

Objective O1.6: Promote the economic and quality of life benefits of open space.

Water Resources

The water resources element describes the physical aspects of surface and groundwater features in the planning area, and addresses historic and projected water demand, future water supply and policy implications.

Goal W1: *Promote development that makes conservative use of renewable water supplies such as effluent, surface water, and Central Arizona Project water when feasible, and that uses groundwater as the primary water source only in the absence of renewable sources.*

Objective W1.1: Encourage protection and enhancement of renewable water and groundwater supplies within the framework of state and federal laws, regulations, and guidelines for existing and future needs.

Goal W2: *Reduce the impacts of development on water quality, land subsidence, and riparian habitat.*

Objective W2.1: Promote the protection and preservation of riparian areas within the framework of state and federal laws, regulations, and guidelines.

Objective W2.2: Encourage the reduction of pollutants in rivers, streams, and washes within the framework of state and federal laws, regulations, and guidelines.

Cost of Development

The cost of development element focuses on fiscal considerations relating to future growth in the planning area and Maricopa County in general.

Goal C1: *Ensure that new development pays its fair and proportional share of the cost of additional public facility and service needs generated by new development.*

Objective C1.1: Develop a method to determine the need for, and assess costs of, new facilities and services required to serve new development in order to maintain service levels.

Objective C1.2: Adopt and implement level of service standards for new development to help promote consistency and certainty in the cost sharing process.

Objective C1.3: Identify and monitor cost sharing programs for potentially adverse impacts.

Agenda for Action

To help ensure effectiveness, stakeholders helped identify various long and short-term actions that will assist in plan implementation. Many of these actions require the continued participation of area residents, as well as public and private organizations. A complete list of actions is included within the plan.